

Agricultural Drought

a breakdown of the costs in the House? He must have had some guidelines in order to arrive at the \$14 million figure. Could he inform the House what they are and is he prepared to table the documents showing that, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Whelan: Mr. Speaker, we have instructions to table the working documents and make them public. It was a joint operation between federal and provincial officials who made the estimates.

The hon. member made representations about wells. I would point out that they are included in the program to supply water to municipalities. It is not just restricted to the farming communities but takes in the whole community, wherever need exists.

The PFRA is one of the most capable bodies in the world. Its engineers have maps showing all the water available, sweet and sour, how deep the wells are, etc. This kind of program is also being worked out with the provinces.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order please. It being one o'clock I do now leave the chair until 2 p.m.

At one o'clock the House took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): Order, please. When the House rose at one o'clock, we were on statements by ministers, but I see that the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) is not present.

An hon. Member: The parliamentary secretary is.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): May I put before hon. members the suggestion that we consider other matters and revert to statements by ministers, if that appears to be appropriate?

Mr. D. M. Collenette (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Ostiguy) is willing to answer questions in the absence of the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan), if that is appropriate to hon. members opposite.

Hon. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, if that is the wish of the House I certainly would not object. I would point out that the rules say that questions under this order can be addressed only to the minister who made the statement.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): The Chair understands from the comments made that I may put the question to the House as to whether or not there is unanimous consent that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture will now handle the questions.

Mr. McKnight: I have two questions that I wanted to put to the minister. Because of the importance of his statement, I shall put them to the parliamentary secretary in the hope that he will seek further advice.

Did the minister or the department have any discussions with the Department of Finance as to an income averaging trust account regarding the sale of cattle at depressed prices because of the drought? I refer to an income averaging trust account similar to the one proposed by hon. members on this side, which would deal with the sale of cattle at depressed prices. Also, has the minister or the cabinet given any consideration to returning PFRA to its rightful place in the Department of Agriculture?

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Ostiguy (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, it must be understood that the statement made this morning by the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) followed a study conducted by a task force made up of Agriculture Canada officials and their counterparts from the western provinces. As far as the matter raised by the hon. member is concerned, that is if a study has been made of short or medium-term livestock sales, I am convinced that the officials of Agriculture Canada, jointly with their provincial counterparts, have looked fully into this problem. Now, would the hon. member be so kind as to repeat his other question, because I have forgotten what it was?

[English]

Mr. McKnight: Mr. Speaker, the question I asked was: due to the need to sell cattle now, although farmers really do not wish to sell because it will disrupt their income and they will be giving away portions of their sales to the tax department, has the minister considered setting up an income averaging trust so that the sales of those cattle would be taxed over an average period rather than in the year of the sale?

[Translation]

Mr. Ostiguy: Mr. Speaker, everyone knows that there is income stabilization insurance for the western provinces as well as for the rest of Canada, and that a great many western farmers benefited from the crop insurance plan to which the Department of Agriculture and the federal government contribute to a large extent. I think that the first thing that had to be done was to estimate the extent and value of drought related damages out west. As for the loss of livestock sales, I think that, if necessary, the agricultural stabilization board can look into the matter during this year.

● (1410)

[English]

Mr. Althouse: Mr. Speaker, I would like to pursue this area of questioning with the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Ostiguy). I am concerned about the need to provide some averaging of income in situations such as the one we are now in where a farmer may be required to unload two or three years of livestock inventory all in one year,